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## THE INFLUENCE OF THE LIFE AND TEACHING OF JESUS ON THE DOCTRINE OF GOD.

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It need scarcely be said that the sources from which Jesus' thought of God is to be derived are the gospels directly, and the epistles indirectly, unless indeed the gospel of John, which is not pure history, and does not profess to be, be classified as likewise indirect source. At all events, the substantial reliability of these sources is assumed here—an assumption which will not be contested by those for whom this discussion is intended.

1. So manifold is the method employed by Jesus in expressing his thought of God—direct statement, parable, moral postulate, revelation in life and death, apostolic witness—that one feels difficulty in forming any conclusion, in respect to the content of that belief, that will do justice to the total data. To be sure, there is always the consideration of the incompleteness of the material, partial induction of facts, and hasty and unwarranted inferences. This suggests the importance of everyone pursuing the investigation and verifying conclusions for himself. Owing to lack of space, process must be suppressed here, and only conclusion given, with perhaps a word or two in support of it.

The conclusion is that the thoughts of Jesus in respect to God may be gathered around the two words *king* and *father*. Briefly said, "king" symbolizes the power and glory and awfulness of God; "father," the love, grace and faithfulness of God.

This conclusion is rendered antecedently probable by a consideration drawn from the history of religion in general and the revelation-religion *par excellence* in particular. If what God in his brooding over man had already accomplished of self-revelation prophesied and necessitated new stages of revelation, and

if there be unity in God's revelation, as indeed there must be since God is one God (Rom. 3 : 29, 30), there is already a presumption in favor of our conclusion. For the history of religion shows that the belief in God leaped forth at its dawn in the personification of nature-powers exciting fear and awe, on the one hand, and in animistic ideas, forerunners of ancestor-cult, on the other. The evolution of the former led to the idea of the power and majesty of the divine, that is, to the conception of God as king; of the latter, to the moral nature of the divine, that is, to the conception of God as father, whatever name in each case the worshiper named him. The title father is given to God in all the higher religions. The ancient Greeks called God "the father of gods and men." We are also his offspring, says a poet quoted by Paul. "The quotation<sup>1</sup> is from a curious poem by Aratus, a native of Cilicia, Paul's own province, who lived about 300 B. C. The poem is a rendering into verse of an astronomical treatise by the same author. It opens with an invocation to Zeus:

From Zeus begin : and never let us leave  
His name unloved. With Him, with Zeus, are filled  
All paths we tread and all the marts of men ;  
Filled, too, the sea and every creek and bay :  
And all, in all things, need we help of Zeus ;  
For we, too, are His offspring."

Not to dwell upon extra-Christian religions, appeal may be made to Old Testament theology in support of the proposition of both ideas in the religion of revelation. This science exhibits the development of the idea of God, passing from a primitive stage belonging to the sphere of natural religion on to a degree of spiritual moral character, the highest conceivable within the limits of the national consciousness. Here, too, the notion of kingliness grew from the natural, fatherliness from the moral. God is taskmaster, lawgiver, and judge; but, also, Israel's creator, redeemer, protector. The nation knew itself to be, not only servant who experiences the master's power and rigor, but also son, first born, heir, who experiences the father's love.<sup>2</sup> "Thou

<sup>1</sup> DALE in *Expositor*, February, 1898, p. 58.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Ex. 4 : 23; Deut. 1 : 31; 8 : 5; Hos. 11 : 1; Jer. 31 : 9-20; Mal. 2 : 10, etc.

art our father, O Lord, our redeemer from everlasting is thy name" (Isa. 63: 16). While the idea of kingliness is dominant in pre-Christian Judaism, it can by no means be said that the name father as applied to God is to be regarded as merely exceptional—it is there organically.

But this brief reference to the subject is sufficient for the purpose of this paper. Assuming orderliness and development in revelation, we would naturally expect to find the two moments recurring in the faith of Jesus. And this is what we do find. On the one hand, the thought of Jesus is affiliated upon the Old Testament conception of the living, holy, supramundane God, who is to be obeyed and feared. He confesses the "God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob," the "God of Israel." To his faith, God is "Lord of heaven and earth," to whom "all things are possible." "Heaven is his throne, the earth his footstool;" "Jerusalem the city of the great King." Especially does all human fear vanish before the fear of "Him who can destroy both soul and body in hell." On the other hand, God is father, to the faith of Jesus. In his case, faith in God as his father is a feeling of the abiding nearness of God; the filial consciousness which knows nothing distant, strange, unfamiliar, unhomelike in his father; the jubilant certainty that God has completely disclosed his heart to him. "The son *knoweth* the father."<sup>3</sup> Jesus felt that there was a depth and intimacy of God's fatherliness toward him, which was exceptional, unshared, and unique. Not that he held that he was coördinate with God. To his pious soul God never ceased to be his God. His uniqueness would have been poor comfort to his devoted and dependent spirit, if thereby he were to become without God.

But, again, does Jesus consider that God is the father of all men? The burden of the apostolic testimony is that God is "the father of our Lord Jesus Christ," and our father through Jesus Christ. In John's gospel, Jesus as the son is the correla-

<sup>3</sup> *Knoweth*, not speculatively or mystically or ecstatically, but morally, by the obedience and fellowship of the right kind of life. Jesus seems to have believed that he alone mediated the perfect knowledge of the father through his own experience of sonship—an experience which was unmediated, immediate, and therefore unique. (Matt. 11: 27.)

tive to father, words which have deep signification in this gospel, and the fatherliness of God to other men is grounded in their relation of faith and life in the only begotten son. And, moreover, the matter may as well rest here if dependence is to be placed only in some distinct or definite passage in the synoptics in which Jesus teaches explicitly that God is the equal father of all mankind. For there is no such passage. But other considerations may be urged on account of which it is impossible to let the matter rest here. It is important to make the all too tardy remark that the expression "fatherhood of God" is as extra-scriptural as misleading. In the popular mind fatherhood is a word with an ontological connotation, and refers to the structural constitution and character of God. Thus the word directs attention to what God is metaphysically rather than morally. But such a conception is foreign to the mind of the biblical writers in general and to Jesus in particular. Their sole thought in the use of the word father is to express a certain moral attitude, purpose, feeling of God toward man — therefore the *fatherliness*, not the fatherhood, of God. Metaphysically, God is the father of no man. Morally, he is the father of all men, in varying degrees indeed, for fatherliness and filialness are correlative terms. Thus, there is of necessity a cordiality, a complacency, an intimacy, in God's fatherliness toward Jesus and those whom Jesus has brought into filial relations to God, which could not obtain between God and the impious. Nevertheless, the absence of filialness in man does not extirpate the fatherliness of that God whom Jesus had in mind when he said: "Love your enemies, and pray for them that persecute you; that ye may be sons of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust" (Matt. 5 : 44, 45). Furthermore, if God were universal King and not universal Father, would not sin have to be interpreted as a rebellion against authority, or an insult to dignity, rather than the cruel and guilty thing that it is, viz., a wound inflicted upon the heart of Love? How can sin be made to appear exceedingly sinful if it be not seen to be impiety toward a father, and how can misery be known at its depth if

it be due simply to the disobedience of a servant to his master, and not to the loneliness and degradation and remorse of a lost child that has exiled itself from the father's home? Such, at least, would seem to be fairly implied in Jesus' own parable of the Prodigal Son. The matter might have been cut short by saying that the correlative of monotheism is universalism.<sup>4</sup>

Thus it appears that, to Jesus, God is King absolute and Father absolute. But these two are not like the two foci of an ellipse, but the center of a circle. The King is fatherly and the Father is kingly. Kingliness is ethicized by fatherliness, and fatherliness is energized by kingliness. God as king is the all-controlling power, the will on which all is dependent; God as father is the eternal goodness by which this omnipotent will is determined and moved. These two thoughts of God not only do not conflict, but reciprocally condition and require each other. Fatherliness attains its fruition when the Almighty, protecting his supremacy to be sure, exalts man to himself in free, prevenient, unmerited love; and almightiness finds its paramount and worthy task in the actual attestation of the fatherly love toward man, in the endowment of man with the kingdom of God. It need scarcely be added that, in Jesus' belief, the real center is not on the side of kingliness but fatherliness, for "God *is* love." But what man needed most of all to learn was just the truth, immediately certain to Jesus, that "the All-Great is the All-Loving too." Neither Christ's thought nor man's need goes beyond this. It is the absolute religion.

2. But it is a more complicated task to establish the principles according to which a critical valuation may be made of the influence of Christ upon the doctrine of God, and this paper is concerned, above everything else, precisely with the valuation of that, in his belief about God, which, in the long historical movement, has the merit of progress, of originality. What, in his belief, is to be credited to inheritance and environment? Suppose that by some alchemy the possession which he shared with his predecessors and contemporaries could be disengaged, would the residuum, if there be a residuum, be fairly the limit

<sup>4</sup> The word does not connote "universal salvation" here.

of his originality, the source and measure of his influence upon the doctrine of God? There are considerations decisive against the adequacy and justness of this standard. For one thing, it will appear that, while many, perhaps all, of his thoughts of God may be discovered among the sayings of men of religious geniality prior to his day, yet no religious genius had cherished all of them, nor held them in the same combination and with the same emphasis. All the tones or notes of a musical masterpiece may be detected by the expert elsewhere; but the harmony is new, its constructive idea is original, its influence peculiarly its own. The composer of the production did not cull out the notes from other compositions and piece them together in an outward and mechanical whole; the masterpiece is not an aggregate of tones from without, but the evolution of a musical life from within. So, similarly, Jesus' belief concerning God may exist in its separate constituents elsewhere, but he was no eclectic putting opinions together in an arbitrary whole foreign to his own consciousness of God. His belief was unitary, *aus einem Guss*; to it is to be accorded the originality of wholeness and harmony, of inwardness and depth. But for another thing, the measure of his influence upon the doctrine of God may not be narrowed to the novelty of his contribution in ideas to that doctrine. For the dignity of his personality and the way the theistic belief appears in him invest even the same beliefs in others with a value and an authority in excess of what they would otherwise deserve. Grant that what Jesus says of God has no more intrinsic truth than what Moses, or Jeremiah, or Confucius, or Plato had said of him; still by so much as the valuation of his person is higher than theirs, by so much will the weight of the influence of what he says be greater than theirs. The origin of a belief may not be due to Jesus, but its power, its creativeness, its historic fruitfulness, may be seen, after varying fortune, to depend ultimately on him alone. Therefore, in estimating the influence of Jesus' thought of God, it is not enough to ask: "Did he say anything new? May it not be derived from what has gone before? Would it not be more accurate to say that it is only 'relatively' new?" To be sure, there have been

mediations and developments; to be sure, one torch kindles another, one prophet awakens another, even the Great Prophet; but how does it come that a helpful insight, a saving thought, is loosely inherited from one generation to another, like a dead stone, till some strong personality seizes it and strikes fire from it? So, for centuries, a great and blessed thought of God, message of a Jonah or a Jeremiah, had fallen unappreciated and impotent, until that thought attained full fruition in the soul of Jesus.

Again, the judgment which one forms of the influence of Jesus upon the doctrine of God will depend upon the service which one seeks from Jesus' teachings on the subject; that is, on whether one avails himself of them for the satisfaction of the religious or the philosophic impulse. It is certain that Jesus' belief is moral-religious, not speculative. It is certain that it is grounded in perfect communion with God, and in the experience of the benefits received from God, and not in an analysis of the ontological essence of God. And it is certain that it is couched in symbols—King, Father—appropriate to the heart and will, not in concepts—Infinite, Absolute, World-Ground, First Cause—intended for the speculative understanding. Jesus attempted no proof of the existence of God. He needed none; nor did he seem to think that proof was needed for anybody else. He constructed no definition of God. He aspired to no psychology of the divine mind. Of the interior mechanism of Deity he had nothing whatever to say. His interest in his heavenly Father was wholly practical. Wordsworth speaks of those who could "botanize on their mother's grave." There was nothing of that in Jesus. And he who desiderates, as the principle of valuation, a contribution to the metaphysical speculation concerning the structure of Deity will turn away from Jesus' thoughts as of no epoch-making importance. For Jesus proclaimed no school-doctrine concerning God and divine things, as the wise of this world are wont to do, but simply gave testimony to the self-experienced secret of the fatherly goodness and love.

But, more definitely, what did he do? He brought forth out

of his treasures both new and old. For his time and people, he replaced the supramundane Taskmaster, jealous of his honor and exacting service, by the giving God, the heavenly Father, generous and magnanimous, devoted to the service of others—clothing lilies, watching sparrows, numbering the hairs of his children's heads, making their carking anxiety about food and raiment unbelief and impiety. He overleaped the pharisaic centuries, linked on to the prophets, and restored the continuity of revelation again. He did more. He changed the center of Old Testament conception from the kingliness to the fatherliness of God, and gave to each a deeper, a richer, a fuller content. He unified the pre-exilic inframundane and the post-exilic supramundane conceptions of God. In a word, to Jesus is to be attributed the merit of the rectification and the enrichment of the two historic conceptions of God as king and as father. The balance had never been properly adjusted. In pre-Christian history, now God was king to the injury of his fatherliness, then you have rigorism in morality and deism in religion or philosophy; now God was father to the injury of his kingliness, then you have eudemonism or naturalism in morality and pantheism in religion or philosophy. For Jesus, God is both immanent and transcendent; in the world, the life and joy and comfort of his people; above the world, their sovereign and strength and ideal. And the Father within and the King above are one God, whose peculiar apostolic name is "The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ"—the name by which God desires men to know him evermore.

3. Turning now, in conclusion, from pre-Christian to subsequent history, what influence did Jesus exercise in the formation of the ecclesiastical conception of God? The credal statement, which has persisted in orthodoxy to this day, was formed in the patristic age, and is given in its finished statement in the so-called Athanasian creed,<sup>5</sup> a part of which must be transcribed here: "We worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in Unity; neither confounding the Persons nor dividing the Substance. For there is one Person of the Father, another of the

<sup>5</sup>*Symbolum Quicunque.*

Son, and another of the Holy Ghost. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost is all one; the Glory equal, the Majesty coeternal. Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Ghost. The Father uncreate, the Son uncreate, and the Holy Ghost uncreate. The Father unlimited, the Son unlimited, and the Holy Ghost unlimited. The Father eternal, the Son eternal, and the Holy Ghost eternal. And yet they are not three eternals, but one eternal. So the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God. And yet they are not three Gods, but one God. [So as to 'Lord.'] *For, like as we are compelled by the Christian verity to acknowledge every Person by himself to be God and Lord, so are we forbidden to say . . . there are three Gods or three Lords.*<sup>6</sup> The Father is made of none, neither created nor begotten; the Son of the Father alone, not made, nor created, but begotten; the Holy Spirit is of the Father and of the Son, neither made, nor created, nor begotten, but proceeding. . . . He, therefore, that will be saved, let him thus think of the Trinity."<sup>7</sup>

Though this creed be in profound contrast to the filial, reverent, religious, practical spirit and faith of Jesus, it has remained the ecclesiastical formula to the present. It would be easy to point out its manifold combinations of insoluble contradictions. But that would be a task at once thankless and painful. It would be much easier and pleasanter to show the providence of God in its formation, because the church needed to incase her faith, the most tender and delicate and easily wounded possession of the spirit of man, in a hard, rigid, thick shell, as she passed into the storm and stress of that wild world of the dark ages—a shell, a dogma, which, like everything else, human or divine, must fall into the ground and die, decompose in the soil of our modern thought, if it would bring forth much fruit. Easy, I say, as it would be either to criticise or to praise, I do neither at

<sup>6</sup> *Italics mine.* "Quia sicut singulatim unamquamque personam Deum ac Dominum confiteri, christiana veritate compellimur: ita tres deos, aut [tres] dominos dicere . . . prohibemur."

<sup>7</sup> "Qui vult ergo salvus esse, ita de Trinitate sentiat."

this time, but turn to a most brief account of the genesis of the dogma and to a statement of the effect that the rediscovery of Jesus by modern historical study is destined to have upon it.

The fathers of the Gentile-Christian church believed that they found in philosophers and poets the same knowledge of God, though in less perfect forms, which the Christian possessed on the basis of revelation. Even what they appropriated from the Scriptures they adapted to their philosophic form of knowledge. But in the evolution of Greek thought this form came to have a content of religion and morality strangely like that of the Christianity of the time. There is always an inner connection between the piety of an age and its conception of God. What was that piety? Its chief characteristic was world-flight. The world was evil. The body was also evil, and the prison and tempter of the soul. Life in the world was vanity. In what, then, did blessedness consist? In participation, through asceticism, and the super-rational faculty of ecstasy, in the Being of God. But what, then, must God be, to correspond to this? Before everything else, just not-world. He must be in abstract opposition to the world. He must exist in eternal and imperturbable repose, unrelated to the world, careless of the fitful fever of life. This the transcendent concept of God of the Platonic-Aristotelian philosophy entered on the wings of this piety into church and theology. God is the one exalted above the world, nay above Being itself, the limitless, the undetermined, the absolutely simple One, a being of abstract colorlessness.

That is the one moment in their thought of God. But there is another moment, the opposite of this, viz., God's positive relation to the world. This is required by Christian faith, which recognizes in God the Almighty Lord and Ruler of the world and of history, the founder and protector of the moral order of the world. As such he is a spiritual being, in the world, thinking and feeling and willing.

Now these are the two thoughts which are decisive for the conception of God in ecclesiastical theology. God is absolutely limitless Being; God is the spiritual founder and disposer of the

natural and moral world. But these two thoughts are disparate. No inner unity exists, nor was ever tried to be shown to exist, between them. What was done? Ecclesiastical theology mediated between the two through using the Logos-speculation. The Logos is the middle-being between God and the world. More definitely, the Logos is, on the one hand, the divine Reason, ruling in the world, which corresponds to the Stoic tradition, and, on the other hand, the ideal world posited in God, the content of the ideas, which is to be referred to Platonic influence. In the Logos, God is with the world, and the world is with God. Thus the Logos is the mediator of the creation, and the mediator of the revelation of God, especially of the revelation of God in Christ Jesus. First it was the question of cosmology which engaged speculation. Tertullian taught that the Logos proceeded from God, as a personal being, for the purpose of creating the world. That he was the subject of incarnation was at first a less important thought. Then this state of the case was reversed. Inasmuch as Origen taught the eternal generation of the Son or Logos, through the Father, he was permitted to issue forth no more for purposes of creation of the world, but to subsist eternally in God; and thus the original relation between Logos-thought and the world-thought was loosened. Athanasius took the last step in this connection; the Logos-thought swallowed up the world-thought, and the Logos was treated as the subject of the incarnation. For Athanasius will no longer hear of the Logos as being of necessity a middle-being between God and the world, mediating between the two. He is, according to his doctrine, of the same substance with the Father, so there was a relation of the one, just as little as of the other, to the world, if such a relation be excluded for the eternal God. Thus the Logos-thought was received into the connection of the Christian faith, and the essential feature of the ecclesiastical trinity is its affirmation of the *eternal deity of the Logos*, with whom Jesus was identified. The problem was this: Christians were monotheists by tradition and conviction; Jesus, accepted as Logos and worshiped as the Son, gave rise to the question, Were Christians to have one God or two? The problem was to

keep their monotheism and worship Jesus as God. After centuries of controversy, Jesus as Logos was included in the Godhead, from which the deity of the Spirit easily followed. The creed did not solve the difficulty of monotheism on the one hand and the deity of Jesus on the other, but rather carried the difficulty up into the region of mystery, and hid it behind the obscure and self-contradictory phrase of the eternal generation of the Son. Thus, as to the thought of God, the message of Galilee receded behind the message of Greece, the gospel of the heavenly Father of Jesus Christ behind the speculation of the trinitarian substance of the ecclesiastics, and the practical approach to God behind the contemplative.

And the rediscovery of the Jesus of history? The new study of his evangel? It begins in principle with the Reformation. Patristic and scholastic Christianity unconditionally exalted the theoretical life, the contemplative life above the practical, active, moral life. To their ideal of life, as always, their conception of God corresponded. Therefore God was thinking substance. But, as against this view, the Christian principle of the Reformation maintains—and with full right—that simple, moral obedience is of more worth to man in drawing near to God than is the speculative or contemplative process. Therefore, according to this new ideal of life, primacy is accorded to moral will, as in man, so in God, and not to thought. Herein is, at bottom, the epochmaking importance of the Reformation. It replaced the old conception—a heritage of Greek philosophy—according to which God is fundamentally substance and that substance thought thinking about itself, with the conception of God as fundamentally the supreme energy of the personal will of love. But the Reformation was a return to Paul, and a return to Paul is, on the whole, a return to Christ. The result is in many ways a richer and fuller doctrine of God. For a thousand years the true relation between the kingliness and fatherliness of God had been obscured—an obscuration traceable to Roman imperialism. Once again fatherliness, as the most godlike thing in God, was to shine forth as the sun. For a thousand years God was not believed to be in the world, nor the world in God. Once again

is he to be recognized in nature and history, "the center and soul of every sphere," and "the Fountain Light of all our day," "the Master Light of all our seeing." For a thousand years thought speculated about the metaphysical substance of Deity; once again the moral character of God is to enjoy its supremacy. Not what God is in himself, but what God is for us, is the great concern. A moral God, morally revealed by Jesus Christ to the moral nature of man—it is the return to this conception, yet with an effort to retain the element of truth in the other, a conception, moreover, to which the future belongs, that the modern world owes ultimately to the Nazarene.